

TRUE STORIES OF
NEW ENGLAND CAPTIVES

CARRIED TO CANADA
DURING THE OLD FRENCH AND INDIAN WARS

BY

C. ALICE BAKER

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thirty-nine of the inhabitants. Wheelwright's house being at the eastern end of the village, was probably one of the first attacked. His little daughter Esther, then seven years old, was captured. The intrepid Storer was also bereft. His daughter Mary, aged eighteen, was among the captives. One longs to know what followed. Was there pursuit? Whither were the captives hurried, and how did it fare with them on the retreat? Alas! no echo from the past replies. We may assume that Mary Storer and Esther Wheelwright were kindly treated by their savage captors, who knew the value of their prize, and doubtless expected a large sum for the ransom of the two girls.

In gloom and despair, the meagre harvest was gathered that autumn by the survivors at Wells. Drearly the winter settled down,—joylessly came planting time again, and a second harvest was garnered, before the veil of silence and suspense, that hung over the fate of the captives was lifted. Then came a letter from Samuel Hill, dated Canada, Oct. 4, 1704, with assurances of the safety of his family, and that of his brother Ebenezer. Meantime Deerfield had been sacked, and in the December, following Hill's letter, Ensign Sheldon of that town set out for Canada. The hearts of all the New England captives there were cheered by the news of his arrival. On the 29th of March, 1705, while in Quebec, he received from his son's wife, Hannah Chapin of Springfield, then a captive in Montreal, a letter enclosing the following,¹ from James Adams, a Wells captive:

"I pray giue my Kind loue to Landlord Shelden, and tel Him that i am sorry for all his los. I doe, in these few lins showe youe, that god has shone yo grat Kindness and marcy. In carrying youre Daighter Hanna and Mary in partickeler, through so grat a jorney far beiend my expectation, noing How Lane they was; the Rest of yore children are with the Indians,—Rememberrance liues near ca-

¹Now in Memorial Hall, Deerfield.

bect,¹ Hannah also lives with the french, In in the sam house i doe."

In reply to his daughter's letter Mr. Sheldon says:

"My desire is that Mr. Addames and you, wud doe al you can with your mistres that my children mite by redemed from the indanes."

Shortly after this, on the 2nd of April, 1705, the captive Samuel Hill, was sent on parole to Boston, as Interpreter with De Vaudreuil's reply to Dudley's proposal for exchange of prisoners, which proposal John Sheldon had carried to Canada. Hill visited his friends in Wells, while on this embassy, and was probably the bearer of the following letter from his brother Ebenezer:

"QUEBEC March 1705.

Cousin Pendleton Fletcher of Saco, Mary Sayer, brother Joseph's daughter, and Mary Storer of Wells, with our other friends and neighbors here, are all well. Myself, wife and child are well. Pray that God may keep, and in due time deliver us.

Your loving brother and sister,

EBENEZER and ABIAH HILL."

Never was the sea so blue,—never did the waves leap so gaily to the shore,—never was the sky so fair, or the air so soft, or the scent of the pines so sweet, as when the news of that letter spread from door to door at Wells. For nearly two years they had mourned their loved ones as dead, when the glad tidings comes that "Cousin Fletcher and Mary Sayer and brother Joseph's daughter and Mary Storer and other friends and neighbors as if named, are well." All was joy in Storer's garrison. In Wheelwright's, not joy, but hope revived, and yearning more intense, and resolve strengthened, to find and rescue Esther if alive.

But where was Esther? Clearly the Hills and James Adams were ignorant of her fate,—but how did this child elude the sharp eyes of John Sheldon, and the vigilance of De Vaudreuil?

¹Quebec.

Chateau-Richer, where he had been sent to prevent his interference with the conversion of his people by the Jesuits. From him Sheldon heard that his children were living, and John Wells learned the sad tidings of his mother's murder. He told them the harrowing tale of the march to Canada, and the details of the captivity. Deacon Sheldon was greatly exercised by his account of the craft and cruelty employed by the French "to ensnare the young, and to turn them from the simplicity of the Gospel to Romish superstition."

Mr. Williams doubtless accompanied the envoys to their first audience with the governor. The good deacon, in his home-spun garments, must have felt himself in strange contrast with the other occupants of the council hall; the governor majestic and surrounded by the brilliant uniforms of his guard; the haughty intendant; popinjay pages loitering about, stern old warriors bedecked with medals, gay young sprigs of the nobility in elegant apparel, "Jesuits, like black spectres, gliding in and out." As Mr. Williams saw the dignity of his fellow-townsmen, unabashed by all this parade, he perhaps thought of the proverb, "Seest thou a man diligent in his business, he shall stand before kings; he shall not stand before mean men."

The deputies received little satisfaction from their conferences with the governor. "God's time of deliverance," says Mr. Williams, "was not yet come." Monsieur de Vaudreuil was civil and diplomatic. He says that the Indians are his allies, not his subjects; he has, therefore, no real right to demand the captives from them. They might perhaps be ransomed, but, "knowing Monsieur Dudley's resolution not to 'set up an Algiers trade' by the purchase of prisoners," he dares not take the responsibility. As to an exchange of those in the hands of the French, he hardly sees what basis for that can be arranged, since he learns by the list of French prisoners sent him that the governor of Bos-

ton has permitted some Port Royalists, who should have been sent home with the exchange, to embark for the West Indies. Moreover, there is Baptiste.

The days passed in alternation of hope and discouragement. Fair promises were succeeded by evasion and delay. Mr. Williams was refused permission to go up to Montreal to talk with his children and neighbors, and sent back to Chateau-Richer.

Leaving Mr. Sheldon to push the search for his children and the other captives, many of whom had been put out of sight, Mr. Livingston set out for Boston on the 18th of March to state the situation of affairs and carry De Vaudreuil's letter to the governor, but returned to Quebec on the 26th, the ice being unsafe. On the 29th, Mr. Sheldon received a letter from his son's wife in Montreal, which probably gave him the first definite intelligence of his children. It appears to have enclosed a letter from one of her fellow-captives, who, on indirect evidence, I assume to be James Adams, captured at Wells, in 1703, with Samuel Hills and others. Of the letter and its enclosure, only the following scrap, in a beautiful hand-writing, remains:

"I pray you my kind loue to Landlord Shelden, and tell Him I am sorry for all his Los. I doe in these few lines showe youe that God has shone yo grat kindness and marcy, In-carrying your Daigh-ter Hanna, and Mary in partickeler through soe grat a iorney far behiend my expectations noing how Lane they was, the Rest of your children are with the Indians. Remembrance lives near ca- bect, Hannah does Lives with the frenc In the same house I doe."

Mr. Sheldon's reply to his daughter-in-law is dated:

"Quebec the 1 of Aperl, 1705.

der child

this is to let you noe that i received yours the 29th of March which was a comfort to me I am whele, blessed be God for it, and i may tell you i dont here of my child as it [yet]. the saye

is that he is in the wodes a hunten. remember my loue to Mr. Addams and his wif and iudah Writ and all the reste as if named and my harty desire is that god would in his own good time opene a dore of deliuerans fore you al, and the meanwhile let us wait with patiens one God for it, hoe can bring lite out of darkness and let us cast al our care one god who doeth care for us and can helpe us Mr Williams is sent down the riuer agane eighteen or twenty miles, I did enjoy his company about three wekes, wh^{ch} was a comfot to me, he giues his loue to al the captives there. My desire is that Mr Addams and you wod doe al you can with your mistress that my children mite be redeemed from the Indanes. Our post returned bake again in 8 days by reson of the badnes of the ise, they goe again the seckout of this month, and i desire to com up to Montreal the beginen of May. John Wels and Ebenezer Warner giues ther loue to al the captiues ther, and so rites your louen father

John Sheldon."

Between the date of the above and the seventh, on which the post is to start again, Mr. Sheldon is busy writing letters. The following, dated April 2d, 1765, is the remnant of that sent by this post to his son John, at Deerfield :

"deer child this fue lines are to let you noe i am in good helth at this time blessed be God for it. i may tell you that we sent away a post the 18th day of March, they ware gone 8 days and returned a gane by reson that the ise was soe bad. this may let you noe I receiued a letter from your wife the 29th of March and she was whel. i may let you noe i haint sene none of my children but here they are gone a hunten."

On the 7th of April, Samuel Hills of Wells, who gladly gave his parole for the opportunity of visiting his friends, accompanied by two Frenchmen named Dubois, set out for Boston with letters from the envoys and the governor of Canada. They went across the country and down the Kennebec to Casco bay, arriving at Piscataqua on the 4th of May; and on the 15th, the letters brought by them were communicated by the governor at Boston to his council. De Vaudreuil re-

criminate in detail the accusations of the duplicate letters sent by Sheldon, "not having received them by Albany." Reiterating obstacles, and stating his terms for the return of the captives, he adds: "Mr. Livingston is a very worthy man, with whom I could soon agree upon an exchange, were not his powers limited. If you were sole in command in New England, as I am here, I should not have hesitated to take your word, and it would really have given me great pleasure to return to you by him all your prisoners. But as you have a Council, whose opinions are often divided, and in which you have but one vote, you must not take it ill that I demand a guaranty for the return of the prisoners on your side, more especially because I, on my side, having absolute authority, am always able to keep my pledged word."¹

The persistent importunities of Mr. Sheldon and Mr. Williams, aided by the friendly offices of Captain de Beauville, an officer of high rank, brought about the ransom of the minister's daughter Esther, one of Sheldon's children, his son's wife and two others unknown. The governor also purchased Stephen Williams from his Indian master, and Livingston told him at Sorel he was to go home with him, "which," says the boy, "revived me very much to think of going home, but the governor quickly altered his mind said I must not go."

In the first days of May, the envoys, with their five redeemed captives, set out on their journey home. The Sieur de Courtemanche, a distinguished officer, with eight French soldiers, accompanied them as escort, carrying duplicates of the governor's letters already forwarded by Hills. Shortly after the departure, four young men, Thomas Baker, John Nims, Martin Kellogg and Joseph Petty, disappointed at not

¹Letter of De Vaudreuil to Dudley, Quebec March 26, 1705, in answer to those of Dudley, sent by Sheldon and Livingston. B. B. Poore Coll. Vol. 5, p. 221, in Mass. Archives.

in Boston,¹ urged the governor to let his son, William Dudley, a young man of eighteen, bear him company to Quebec and return on the same vessel. Glad of an opportunity to acquire information and hoping thereby to obtain the release of some, the governor consented. "Bread, Beer, Flesh and Pease for a twenty days" voyage are ordered aboard Captain Vetch's vessel, with "a Hogshead of good wine as a present to the Governor of Quebec." The two Dubois are sent home by land; Courtemanche orders Samuel Hills to accompany him by sea. Dudley's dispatches² are dated Boston the 4-15 July, 1705, and probably the vessel sails the next day.

Concerning the exchange, Dudley makes all proper concessions. It may take place at Mount Desert, whither he will send all the French prisoners on any day when De Vaudreuil will send the English there. He will buy none from the Indians, but if they are not at once rescued from them, he will retaliate and "your people will be reduced to accommodate themselves to a savage life as well as mine." He resents the insinuation that his authority is limited; he will send Allain home, and with him, in exchange for the two girls Mr. Livingston brought back, two strong men of Port Royal, captives here. "As to Baptiste I think Monsieur de Courtemanche has learned so many things about his dastardly conduct that you will agree with me that he is a rascal who does not deserve that you should want him back, and perhaps you will think he is not worth my keeping, wherefore

¹Sewall's Diary, Vol. 2, pp. 133-4 has the following: "July 4, Comencement Day, I go by Water. . . . Capt. Courtmaruh was there, and din'd in the Hall." A footnote by the Editor says "This name is utterly strange and mysterious. We have no clew to the person intended." Evidently this was the Sieur de Courtemanche, whose illness may have been the result of his Commencement festivities. C. A. B.

²B. P. Poore Coll. in Mass. Archives.